

to march on London and form a junction within the walls. At the same time East Anglia and other more distant parts of the country were to rise; whether partly to assist in the march on London, or solely to create local diversions and to obtain local ends, it is impossible to say. Messengers were sent all over these districts in the summer of 1381, to prepare the country for the event. They were men of various counties, and they did not always visit the localities of which they were respectively natives.¹ Such agitators had long been at work in the villages and towns of England, but they now came bearing, not general exhortations, but a particular command from the * Great Society/ as they called the union of the lower classes which they were attempting to form. Some of these messages have been, fortunately, preserved for us in the original words. They bear the stamp of genuineness on their face, unlike the confessions and dying speeches of the leaders, which were probably composed by the chroniclers from the exaggerated rumours of the time of reaction. But no monk could have invented John Ball's famous message. It breathes the deep and gallant feeling that led the noblest among the rebels to defy gallows and quartering block in the cause of freedom :—

* John Schep, some time Saint Mary's priest of York, and now of Colchester, greeteth well John Nameless and John the Miller and John Carter, and biddeth them that they beware of guile in borough, and stand together in God's name, and biddeth Piers Plowman go to his work, and chastise well Hob the Bobber, and take with you John Trueman and all his fellows and no mo ; and look sharp you to one-head (union) and no mo.

John the Miller hath yground small, small,
small.
The King's son of heaven shall pay for all.
Be ware or ye be wo (worse).
Know your friend from your foe.
Have enough and say " ho " I (stop)
And do well and better and flee sin,
And seek peace and hold therein.
And so bid John Trueman and all his fellows ' *

¹ Powell, 27, 41, 43, 49, 57, 127 ; C. R. R., 488, Bex, vi.
(Eey. 196) Well*
wad Harry. * Wals., ii. 33-4.